

# SCOPUS

## SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

### THE AFRICAN BIRD COLLECTIONS OF S.A. WHITE OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Mathews (1910), Chisholm, Condon and Whittell (all 1954) mention that the Australian naturalist and ornithologist, Samuel Albert White, born 20 December 1870, died 19 January 1954, collected birds in central and eastern Africa and that he served in South Africa in the Imperial Forces as a captain during the second Anglo-Boer War. His African bird work did not give rise to any publications. His surviving African bird specimens, some 408 skins of 143 species, were presented to the South Australian Museum, Adelaide, by his widow, Muriel, in 1976. This collection has been studied and it is now possible to elucidate his African work in the light of his surviving material and the letters he wrote to his cousin, the ornithologist J.W. Mellor. The places and dates where he collected birds are given in Table 1. Place names have been modernized where necessary. We do not list all the species collected since most of them are well known from the areas he visited but only those that are worthy of note for one reason or another.

The collection was relabelled at some stage and, unfortunately, a few specimens had the wrong labels attached to them, e.g. the Eastern Bearded Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas quadrivirgata* and Tropical Boubou *Laniarius ferrugineus* (*aethiopicus*) are labelled as from the east side of Table Mountain (Kirstenbosch), Cape Town, in July 1901 whereas they were obtained in eastern Africa in August or September 1903: these forms do not occur anywhere near Cape Town. However, this was an occasional error and there is no reason to doubt that virtually all specimens are correctly labelled. Lists of his African material are held by the Percy FitzPatrick Institute of African Ornithology and by the East London Museum.

#### SOUTH AFRICA

White joined the South Australian Imperial Bushmen as a lieutenant and distinguished himself on 6 June 1901 in the affair at Graspan near Reitz in the Orange Free State (Wallace 1976). Presumably it was just after this that he was promoted to captain for, while his unit continued to fight its way northward through the O.F.S. into the Transvaal, he went to Cape Town and collected his first birds there on 19 July (Table 1). He collected birds in the Districts of Cape Town, Wynberg and Stellenbosch till 12 August while waiting to go to Colesberg as Administrator of No. 12 Area. As may be seen from Table 1 he obtained his first birds in the Colesberg District on 17 August so the train journey from Cape Town to Colesberg must have been made between 12 and 17 Aug-

TABLE 1  
S.A. White's African collecting localities in date order

Locality	°/S	°/E	Dates
E side of Table Mt			
= Kirstenbosch	33.59	18.25	19-29 July 1901
Eastbrooke, ? = Rondebosch	33.58	18.28	19 July 1901
Muldervslei	33.50	18.49	31 July
Plumstead	34.02	18.28	2 August
Elsenberg	33.50	18.50	12 August
Colesberg	30.46	25.05	17 August 1901 - 5 June 1902
Agtertang Siding	30.42	25.18	17 August and 21 September
Palmietfontein	30.47	25.08	11 September - 11 October
Raasfontein	30.51	25.15	27 September and 1 November
Rensberg Siding	30.50	25.05	3 - 13 October
Joubert Siding	30.42	25.12	4 October
Longwood	30.47	24.55	6 October
Buffelsvlei	30.40	25.09	8 October
13 miles E of Hanover	31.00	24.26	19 October
Sea Cow R. = Seekoeirivier, probably where the main road crosses it at	30.20	25.00	25 - 29 October
Rietfontein	30.41	25.43	31 October - 12 November
Wagon bridge at the Orange R., ? = Bothasdrif	30.30	25.11	13 November
Hall R. = Holle R.	30.46	25.16	22 November 1901 - 21 July 1902
Kraai R. Bridge = Kraaibrug	30.47	26.51	27 April - 27 July
North bank of the Orange R. near Aliwal North	30.42	26.42	6 and 20 June
Stormfontein, ? = Lekker- draai Siding	30.50	20.24	15 - 21 July
Klipkrans	30.50	25.32	18 July
30 miles east of Colesberg = Venterstad	30.47	25.47	18 July
Franschhoek	33.55	19.07	14 - 19 September
Pemba Bay = Porto Amelia	12.57	40.30	9 and 10 August 1903
100 miles west of Pemba Bay, ? = Montepuez	13.13	39.00	(? 13 August)
Dunga, Zanzibar Island	6.09	34.20	18 - 25 August
Lamu Island	2.27	40.54	31 August - 8 September

ust. He collected birds intermittently in every month of his stay there until June 1902. In 1902 his duties took him eastwards into the Venterstad, Albert and Aliwal North Districts and even just across the Orange River into the Rouxville District of the O.F.S. where he obtained a few birds in June. No birds were obtained in August but he spent some days in September collecting at Franschhoek in the Paarl District of the southwestern Cape, presumably while on leave before embarkation for Australia. In all, 312 specimens of 94 species from South Africa survive.

#### EAST AFRICA

Like so many other visitors to Africa he was fascinated by it and determined to return to collect birds, insects, plants and big game trophies. He returned to Cape Town on 30 June 1903. By 2 August he was at sea between Maputo and Beira. He stopped at Pemba Bay in which lies Porto Amelia, capital of Cabo

Delgado, the ornithologically least known province of Mozambique. On 9 and 10 August he obtained there the Emerald-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur chalcospilos*, Red-faced Mousebird *Urocolius indicus*, Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus*, Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*, Eastern Nicator *Nicator gularis*, Collared Sunbird *Antheptes collaris*, White-bellied Sunbird *Nectarinia talatala*, Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus*, Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*, Bronze Mannikin *Lonchura cucullata* and Brimstone Canary *Serinus sulphuratus*. None of these species is recorded from Porto Amelia by Frade (1953a, b) though *M. pusillus* and *L. cucullata* are recorded from elsewhere in the Province by Frade (1953a) and *U. indicus* and *P. griseus* likewise by Frade (1953b). At Pemba Bay White met the Duke de Fruas who had just returned from a safari to Lake Malawi. They travelled together for three days (about 160 km) back towards the lake, and White obtained the Brown-breasted Barbet *Lybius melanopterus*, *A. collaris*, Cordon-bleu *Uraeginthus angolensis* and *E. astrild* where they camped near Montepuez before returning to the coast. None of these four species is recorded by Frade (1953a, b) for the Cabo Delgado Province.

By 18 August White was collecting birds on Zanzibar Island, mostly at Dunga, and continued to do so until 25 August by which time he had obtained over 100 specimens of which just over 30 survive. Most of his surviving material is of species now well known from the island but he obtained a pair of Little Bitterns *Ixobrychus minutus payesii* on 25 August, a male Lesser Spotted (= Bailon's) Crake *Porzana pusilla obscura*<sup>1</sup> on 21 August and a female Madagascar Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus*. *Porzana pusilla* is not recorded from Zanzibar, and the other two species are rare there (Pakenham 1979).

White also obtained specimens on Zanzibar of the African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis* of which four survive. Pakenham (*op. cit.*) discusses the forms occurring in Zanzibar without coming to a firm conclusion. The three adult and subadult specimens before us are *T. v. plumbeiceps sensu* Meise (1968) with grey throats: two have darker grey crowns and one has a somewhat iridescent dark blue crown. The fourth specimen is a fledgling taken on 20 August and on its label White has noted "shot a long tailed male feeding this bird". The two adults are males taken on 20 August and both have their long tail feathers shot off. One of them is presumably the parent of the fledgling. The fledgling specimen is a poor one but there is nothing about it to suggest that it is subspecifically different from the others. This is the first breeding record for Zanzibar (Pakenham 1979). It would seem that the type of *T. v. ungujaensis* Grant & Mackworth-Praed 1947 taken on Zanzibar Island in 1877 was a non-breeding visitor from the mainland and that the island does not form part of its breeding range. The alternative would be two species, a problem which we are unable to go into here but which seems very unlikely on a relatively small island.

White then visited Lamu Island on the coast of Kenya and collected birds between 31 August and 8 September but obtained no species that need be mentioned here. He also used Lamu as a base to visit various places on the mainland. He may well have collected insects or plants on these trips, or even sought a shot at a game trophy but there is no evidence that he collected birds unless those merely labelled 'Africa' came from this portion of his trip. He left Lamu on or after 21 September for Cape Town where he took ship for Australia. His last sight of Africa was at Durban which he left on 19 October 1903.

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<sup>1</sup>Britton (1980), following White (1965), does not recognize *obscura* as distinct from the race *intermedia*.

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- Scopus* 8: 33-36, June 1984

Received 17 February 1984

#### DISTINCT STATUS CHANGES OF CERTAIN PALAEARCTIC MIGRANTS IN THE SUDAN

A large number of Palaearctic species visit the Sudan on passage or during the northern winter and a few overwinter. While most of these originate from eastern Europe and Asia, there are some of which the whole Eurasian breeding population visits the country.

Comparing the records before 1955 (Butler 1905, 1908, Bowen 1926, 1931, Cave & Macdonald 1955) with those after that year (A. Pettet *in litt.*, G. Nikolaus from 1976 to 1983 pers. obs) it is clear that drastic changes have taken place in the status of some species, which form the subject of this note.

##### Waldrapp *Geronticus eremita*

Cave & Macdonald (1955) state that the Waldrapp (or Bald Ibis) is "Rare although recorded as occurring in flocks of several hundreds", while Bowen (1926) also states it to be "common on the coast - resident" even though breeding has never been mentioned for this region. There are at least five skins in the Khartoum Natural History Museum (KNHM) from the Red Sea coast for years before 1940.

After 1955 there is only one sight record (GN, pers. obs.) of a single bird on presumed spring passage on 18 March 1983 near Suakin (19.05N, 37.20E). This decline in numbers conforms with the recent reduction in the known eastern Mediterranean breeding population (Brown *et al.* 1982, Cramp & Simmons 1977), from which birds recorded in the Sudan are likely to have come.

##### Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

Bowen (1926) and Cave & Macdonald (1955) regarded this species as a common